



NOAA, NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE, WEATHER FORECAST OFFICE

Miami, Florida 33165



Jupiter Beach Web Cam: Sept. 12, 2006

Tuesday February 1st: Marine Hazards and Rip Current Awareness Day

Although tropical cyclones and lightning often grab the weather headlines, there's another weather-related hazard that year in and year out ranks as the deadliest. Since 1979, rip currents, sometimes erroneously referred to as rip tides or undertows, have claimed more lives in south Florida than any other weather-related hazard combined!

2010 was no different. A total of **seven** (7) people lost their lives at south Florida beaches last year as a result of rip currents, with an additional **sixteen** (16) people

requiring medical attention. Hundreds more south Florida swimmers had to be rescued by lifeguards. These statistics underscore the outstanding job of lifeguards in keeping swimmers safe, as well as the importance of swimming near a lifeguard.

Rip currents are naturally occurring and can affect virtually all of the surf beaches along the south Florida coast. These currents can pose a big threat to unsuspecting beachgoers. Rip currents can be referred to as the fair weather killer because they often occur when the weather appears to be generally nice. All that's required is a moderate to fresh onshore wind.

What makes rip currents so dangerous? A rip current is a strong channel of water flowing out past the surf zone that can pull even the strongest swimmer into deeper water beyond the sand bar. Most deaths occur when people caught in the rip current try to swim toward shore directly against the current, become totally exhausted and drown. Sometimes, would-be rescuers also drown. By understanding how a rip current works, people can escape this fate.

Rip currents are normally only about 10 to 30 yards wide, and the best escape, especially for the weak or non-swimmer, is to wade or swim sideways across the current and parallel to shore. The rip current weakens rapidly only a relatively short distance seaward of the sand bar, and therefore another means of escape is to float with the current out beyond the breakers, then swim shoreward at an angle away from the current.

The best way to stay safe and to be informed of the presence of dangerous rip currents is to heed the advice of lifeguards. Make sure you swim at guarded beaches and be aware of the flag color system used by ocean rescue personnel to alert of rip currents. If you see a red flag at or near the lifeguard stand, strong and dangerous currents are present and you should not enter the water. Your chances of being rescued from a rip current are significantly higher when swimming within sight of a lifeguard.

Always try to swim at guarded beaches. Statistics show that the vast majority of rip current drowning deaths occur at unguarded beaches or during times when lifeguards are not on duty. If planning to swim at an unguarded beach, pay close attention to rip current information signs posted at many beaches and keep abreast of forecasts and statements issued by the national weather service.

South Florida's aquamarine waters make this prime boating country. We are surrounded by water on three sides and the third largest fresh water lake in the United States, Lake Okeechobee, sits just north of the Everglades. There is also a vast network of canals, bays and other waterways which cut across the area. These bodies of water are very vulnerable to rapid changes in the weather which can occur in south Florida throughout the year. Fast moving thunderstorms are a threat mainly during the summer months but can occur year-round and catch mariners by surprise. Sudden gusts of wind and rough

seas associated with local thunderstorms as well as swells from distant storms can be strong enough to overturn boats. Waterspouts are common occurrences over all of south Florida's large bodies of water year-round, although they're more frequent during the warm and humid summer months. Therefore, you must prepare and stay aware of weather threats in order to remain safe while enjoying a day out on the boat. NOAA Weather Radio is an excellent source of continuous weather information, including warnings and advisories for rapidly changing and dangerous weather conditions.

The National Weather Service in Miami issues daily Hazardous Weather Outlooks and Surf Forecasts which alert the public of expected hazardous marine weather and rip currents. The rip current threat is also forecast daily on a scale ranging from none, to slight, to moderate, to high. Coastal and special weather statements are also issued when the rip current threat is high. This information can be obtained via NOAA Weather Radio, television or commercial radio, or by visiting the National Weather Service in Miami website at weather.gov/southflorida and clicking on the current hazards for south Florida link.

For further information on rip currents and rip current safety, please visit the national weather service rip current awareness website at www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov.